

# The Grand-Place

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AVB Archives Ville de Bruxelles  
HHUCB Historical Heritage Unit of the City of Brussels  
KBR Bibliothèque royale de Belgique - Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België  
KIK-IRPA Institut royal pour le Patrimoine artistique - Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium  
MRBAB Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique  
MVB Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles - MSB Museum van de Stad Brussel  
RMN Réunion des Musées nationaux  
SPRB-GOB Service Public Régional Bruxelles - Gewestelijke Overheidsdienst Brussel

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# The Grand Place

Eric Hennaut



**View of Brussels from Scheut, watercolour by H. Van Wel, c. 1700.**  
(© KBR, Cabinet des Estampes).

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Grand Place.  
(Eberlin-Brunetta © SPRB-GOB)

## Medieval-era Grand Place

Like most Belgian cities, Brussels doesn't have a really ancient origin. In fact, Brussels developed at the turn of the first millennium at the crossroads of commercial routes connecting Flanders with the Rhine and Meuse regions and a small navigable river, the Senne, which crosses part of Brabant and makes it possible to reach the port of Antwerp to the north.

Situated close to the right bank of the Senne, along the former trade route that spanned the city, the *Low market*, *Forum inferius* or *Nedermerct*, referenced for the first time in a 1174 text, quickly became the economic and later the political heart of the city.

The commercial role was to remain a key function throughout its history. Even now, most of the surrounding streets still have names that allude to the intense economic activity that extended out into the streets surrounding the square: Rue du Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt (Herbs Market Street), Rue du Marché aux Poulets / Kiekenmarkt (Chicken Market Street), Rue du Marché aux Fromages / Kaasmarkt (Cheese Market Street), Rue du Marché

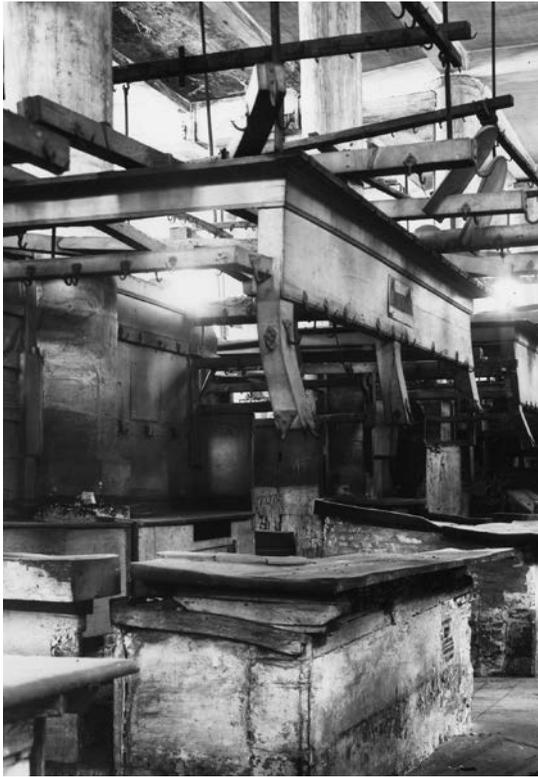
au Charbon / Kolenmarkt (Coal Market Street), Rue du Marché aux Peaux / Huidenmarkt (Animal Hide Market Street), Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat (Butter Street), Rue Chair et Pain / Vlees en Broodstraat (Meat and Bread Street), Rue des Harengs / Haringstraat (Herring Street) and Rue des Bouchers / Beenhouwerstraat (Butchers Street). Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the square itself was the venue for daytime and night-time markets on an almost daily basis, the spirit of which survives today in the Grande Place's flower market. One needs to imagine the ground blanketed in a variety of goods, the daily erection and dismantling of stalls and the non-stop passing of carts loaded with food and products, to properly understand the nature of Grand Place and its architectural transformations.

Texts from the 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries reveal the, undoubtedly gradual, installation of a commercial complex under the authority of the Duke of Brabant comprised of three covered markets - for bread, cloth and meat - on the vast block delimited by the square, Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt, Rue des Harengs / Haringstraat and what is now Rue Chair et Pain / Vlees en Broodstraat. The memory of the bread market lives on in the name *Broodhuys* (Bread House) known in French as *la Maison du Roi*, while the meat market, rebuilt several times, existed until the 1920s on the site where a large arcaded building now stands along Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt.

There was nothing yet to suggest the future architectural magnificence of the site. The square, which was originally paved with roughly-hewn field-stone, situated around 1.2 m below the current surface, was surrounded by irregularly-aligned wooden houses and several stone townhouses or *steenen*. One of the oldest religious buildings in the city, the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas, patron saint of merchants, was established nearby,

The town hall and cloth market hall in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, engraving by A. Santvoort based on a drawing by L. Van Heel. This unusual vista was most likely drawn from the former belfry of the St. Nicholas Church, which has since vanished. Behind the town hall the cloth hall market, erected in 1353 and which would later be destroyed in the 1695 bombardment, can be seen. (© MVB)





Interior view of the former meat market hall or *Grande Boucherie* situated between *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* and *Rue du Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt* (now disappeared). Rebuilt after the 1695 bombardment, the building partially collapsed in 1917 and was demolished a few years later. Photograph c. 1914. © KIK-IRPA, Brussels)

between the square and the Senne. The first aldermen, whose judicial functions had been set out in a charter of franchise in 1229, held council in the church, in the market buildings or outside in the marketplace itself.

From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the archives make it possible to trace the square's rapid development, where the municipal authority began to play an increasingly key role. In 1301, the City acquired a stone house called *De Meerte* located on the site of the future town hall's clock tower, in which it installed the municipality's offices. This initial purchase was followed, twenty years later, by the acquisition of a second building, *Den Wilden Ever* (Wild Boar), located close to the future tower. At the same period all of the streets leading to the market were paved. Towards 1353, while the Brussels cloth industry was at its peak, supplying luxury fabric to all the courts of Europe, the City undertook construction of a vast covered municipal cloth market along *Rue de l'Amigo / Vrunstraat*, behind the future town hall. This market was

enlarged at the end of the century through the acquisition of properties leading up to the *Rue des Pierres / Steenstraat*. Around the same time, the City decided to expropriate the various properties situated between *Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat* and *Rue des Harengs / Haringstraat* to even up this side of the market.

## Construction of the town hall

On the cusp of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings used as the town hall were no longer in keeping with the City's ambitions. Following the example of Bruges 25 years earlier (1376), in 1401-1402, Brussels began construction of a new council building, the magnificence of which was to exceed all previous creations. This is how it is recalled, in an unusual addition, in a chronicle from the Abbey of Floreffe written around 1462:

«*L'an de grâce mille trois cent  
Dix-neuf avecque quatre-vingt.  
Deux ans après, je le sais bien,  
Fut commenchié la maison belle  
Sur le grand marchiet à Bruxelles,  
Qui est le plus bel édifice  
Qu'oncques visse et le plus riche.*»

"In the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and ninety-nine.  
Two years later, I know to be true,  
Was commenced the handsome house  
In the great marketplace in Brussels,  
Which is the most beautiful building  
That has ever been seen and the richest."

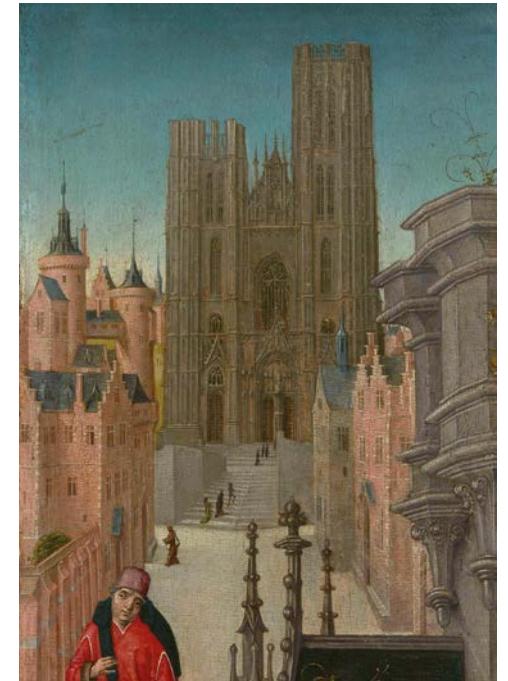
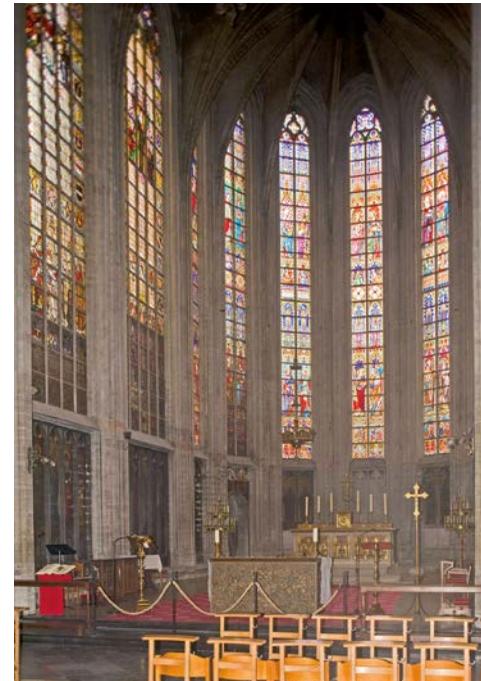
Its design ushered in one of the most important periods in the architectural history of Brussels. The City, undergoing a blossoming of the arts,

**Choir of the Church of Our Lady of Sablon, c. 1435.**

(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2012 © SPRB-GOB)

**Façade of the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula, detail from *L'Instruction pastorale* painted by the anonymous Flemish painter known as *Maitre à la vue de Sainte-Gudule*, c. 1470-1480. The top part of the left tower had not yet been built. Construction on the Gothic church began at the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the building of the façade and two towers which were completed around 1480. Jean Van Ruysbroeck, who designed the spire of the town hall, was tasked with supervising the works in 1470.**

(© RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre / G. Blot)





Detail of the altarpiece of the **Quatre Couronnés Guild** which united the major construction trades: sculptors, stonemasons, masons and slate roofers. Anonymous painting from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century kept at the City of Brussels Museum. © MVB

definitively supplanted Louvain as the residence of the Dukes of Brabant before becoming one of Philip the Good's favourite residences.

In order to properly understand the context in which the town hall was built, it is necessary to imagine a rapidly-evolving urban landscape in which the clergy, the City and the Court competed against each other in sweeping building campaigns which very nearly changed the monumental image of the city in its entirety. Clinging to the hillside, construction of the Collegiate Church of St. Michael and St. Gudula - now a cathedral-continued right through the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with part of the nave, side aisles and especially the grand façade with its two towers turned towards the city. In the Sablon neighbourhood, rebuilding of the Chapel of Notre Dame began at the start of the century with its new choir being completed in 1435. After a huge fire in 1405, the clergy of Our Lady of the Chapel decided to completely rebuild the nave and tower of the old church. From the moment of his enthronement as Duke of Brabant in 1430, Philip the Good undertook vast works to extend Coudenberg Palace, culminating

in the famous *Aula Magna* (1452-1461) which would serve as the setting for the pomp and circumstance of the court of the Dukes of Burgundy.

Development of the town hall can be divided into three major phases: the left building, the right building and then the upper section of the central tower. The initial project, which commenced in 1401-1402, consisted of the left building, the right-angled building along *Rue de l'Étoile* (now Rue C. Buls / K. Bulsstraat) and, most likely, the first floors of the tower. The only account still in existence, dating from October 1405, identifies the name of the architect, Jacques Van Thienen - also referred to as Jacques of Saint Gudula, on which he also worked- assisted by Jean Bornoy who supervised a team of 17 masons, 4 stonemasons and 27 journeymen. Similar to all of the construction sites in Brussels, the white stone used came from quarries located in the immediate vicinity of the city. The works seem to have progressed rapidly as the same account indicates that part of the building was already roofed while the gilding of the decorative elements of a turret located close to the *L'Étoile / De Sterre* townhouse was in the process of being executed.

On 4 March 1444, the young Count of Charolais, son of Philip the Good and the future Charles the Bold, laid "at the foot of the existing tower", the foundation stone of the right building which extends towards Rue de la Tête d'Or / Guldenhoofdstraat. The extension was probably in response to one of the greatest upheavals experienced by the City administration over the course of its history. In 1421, a wide-scale revolt by craftsmen succeeded in forcing the patricians, who until then had controlled the council, to share power. The new structure that was established split the jobs of the Magistrate who managed the city between two groups. These positions were now shared between representatives of the aristocracy divided into seven Lineages, and the representatives of the craftsmen grouped into nine Nations (two mayors, seven aldermen, six councillors, two treasurers and two tax collectors). This complex arrangement was undoubtedly connected with the extension of the building.

In January 1449, the architect Jean Van Ruysbroeck was commissioned to give the building its definitive profile by completing the crowning of the tower with three octagonal storeys and an exceptionally light openwork spire. The oath that he swore as master mason of the tower of the town hall on the Market gives a clear indication of his responsibilities. He undertook to direct the works



Engraving by Melchisedech Van Hooren, 1565. The oldest detailed depiction of the town hall shows its façades devoid of sculptures, apart from the base of the tower and right turret which were decorated with figures of the Dukes of Burgundy. The left turret has, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, featured a clock which punctuated the rhythm of market life. © KBR, Cabinet des Estampes

Town hall. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2011 © SPRB-GOB)



The original statue of Saint Michael was lowered onto Grand Place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for restoration before being put back in place. (© AVB)

Statue of Saint Michel slaying the demon, replica created in 1996. (Ch. Bastin and J. Evrard © SPRB-GOB)

Statue of Saint Michael slaying the demon, original from 1455, now deposited. The weather vane sculpture that crowns the town hall is made from hammered copper plates attached to an iron framework. Certain solid parts, such as the hands, cross and claws of the demon were cast in brass. The entire piece was gilded in gold leaf. (V. Everarts © MVB)



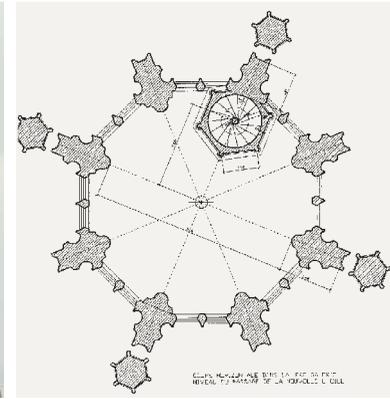
on the tower; draw up the plans, sculpt or arrange for the sculpting of wooden models, ensure, on a daily basis, the quality of the stone and its installation, as well as supervise the work of the craftsmen. The text specifies that he was required to reside in Brussels for the duration of the works and not leave the city for longer than a day and a night without the express permission of the tax collectors. Finally, if he breached these commitments, he could be dismissed from his position and would be personally liable for any debts.

Without spoiling the coherence of the town hall as a whole, the two buildings, built within 40 years of each other, present a number of differences, in terms of size, form and structuring of motifs. The first floor windows are completely different. The portal itself is not positioned in line with the tower. In reality, these elements are merely secondary when the building is viewed from any discernible angle, when crossing the square, which is itself also irregularly-shaped, with an uneven base and an irregular layout of buildings. In 1455, the symbol of the city, the famous statue of *Saint Michael slaying the demon* created by Martin Van Rode, was hoisted onto the top of the building. This imposing piece, constructed from gilded hammered copper plates and measuring around 5 m in height from base to sword tip, was designed as a weather vane that pivots almost 100 m above the paving stones of the square. The protective archangel is therefore always facing any winds or storms that might threaten the city. Predating the famous Giralda of Seville (16<sup>th</sup> century) and the great figurative weather vanes of Venice (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), Saint Michael is one of the foremost accomplishments of this type preserved in Europe. Since 1996, the original statue, having become too weathered over time, has been replaced by an exact replica.



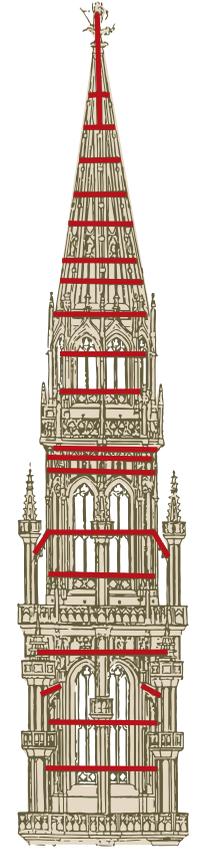
## A FILIGREE OF STONE AND IRON

The design of the town hall's tower, which is the building's most spectacular element, is deserving of particular attention. Above the rooftops, three octagonal tiers sit atop a square-shaped base. Although the most common arrangement consisted of aligning four of the eight sides of the octagon with the square base (Belfry of Bruges), here the architect opted for a more subtle variation: the centre of each side of the square corresponds with a corner of the octagon, an arrangement that highlights the vertical momentum and graphic character of the project. The base's four corners contain octagonal bell turret abutments that resemble the upper sections of the building's corner turrets and are connected to the central structure



by small flying buttresses. Similar, but narrower, hexagonal-shaped structures ascending to the second level rise from the centre of each side of the square base. The third level features windows, whose curved ogee arches merge into the pyramid-shaped openwork spire.

As it was for a host of colossal Gothic buildings, the specific properties of stone and iron were combined to create an impressively bold structure. Although the metal is barely visible, it plays a crucial role in the lightness, solidity and durability of the upper section. The last restoration (1987-1997) revealed the use of at least 20 tons of iron, a large part of which was applied in the medieval tower for banding, saddle bars and various other elements on each level, along with the pivot for the weather vane, a part measuring around 8 m in height and 10 cm wide which is one of the most important known examples for this period.



The tower of the town hall. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2012 © SPRB-GOB)

Horizontal cross-section of the first gallery of the town hall's tower. The spiral staircase leading to the top can be seen in the upper part of the drawing. (Source: Report of the stability studies for the repair works of the town hall tower, September 2000)

Drawing of the town hall tower. Metal elements revealed during the last restoration are shown in red. (1987-1997). (© P. Halleux)

Joanna of Castille, wife of Philip the Handsome, entering Grand Place in 1496. In the background, the miniature shows the town hall on whose tower, surmounted with the gilded Saint Michael, lit torches have been placed.  
 © Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett



From the start, the almost ethereal richness and delicacy of the crowning was further accentuated by the gold leaf that covered both the statue of Saint Michael, the fifty-five leaf crockets on the spire and the frame around the eight upper windows. On festival evenings, countless resin pots were affixed to the tower transforming it into a veritable filigree of light. The poet Jean Molinet, chronicler of the House of Burgundy, has left us a souvenir of the days of jubilation where "the front of the town hall was stretched with silk and surrounded with large numbers of tall torches; and furthermore, from its tower, including the image of Saint Michael, were hung burning lanterns and other reflective instruments, such that when viewed from afar it seemed more like fire than stone."

## THE GOTHIC SCULPTURES

The façades of the town hall were not originally adorned with the profuse sculpted decoration that they display today. It was not until the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it was decided to "complete" the building by progressively filling its niches with some 300 statues. On the contrary, the portal and galleries of the two buildings, offer a remarkable series of sculptures dating from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

### The sculptures from the portal and left building

The most famous series are positioned in the arches of the gateway and consist of eight seated statues holding phylacteries, generally assumed to be prophets. Most likely sculpted around 1400, these compact, contemplative figures are probably a symbolic reference to the dignity of the City's administrators. Like almost all of the medieval sculptures of the façades, the originals, which still retain traces of their polychrome, have been preserved at the City of Brussels Museum in Maison du Roi / Broodhuys. While the five statues from the tympanum and the six allegories scattered here and there around the doorway date from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the corbels date back to the original construction. Beneath the tympanum can be seen, in succession, a kneeling woman confessing to a priest, two musicians, two groups of two persons holding phylacteries and an embracing couple. Under one of the statues, to the right of the doorway, can be found an interesting depiction of an argument where one of the protagonists has grabbed the other by his beard. The left gallery features a mix of sacred and profane themes, including an Annunciation spread over two keystones.

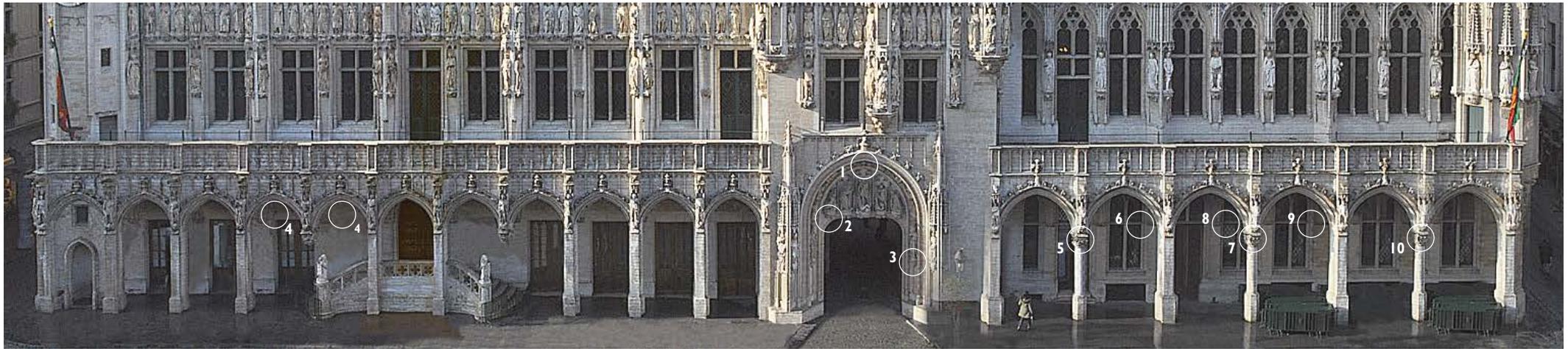


Figures from the portal of the town hall, c. 1400. The originals, now preserved in the City of Brussels Museum, display traces of polychrome. The scribe holds an inkwell in his left hand while from his wrist hangs a case containing his quills as well as a small bag, most likely containing the gold powder or pigments that were used to enhance the illuminations.  
 (V. Everarts © MVB)

### The sculptures of the right building

The most original iconography is to be found in the right gallery. The subject of the sculptures illustrates, in the form of a rebus, the name of the three properties expropriated to make way for the new building: *Scupstoel*, *Papenkelder* and *De Moor*.

The capital of the first column on the right side of the entryway, where several characters can be seen piling up chairs using large shovels, corresponds to the Flemish word *scupstoel* (ducking stool, a contraption used for public humiliation in which offenders were raised above water and then dropped in), broken down into *scup* (shovel) and *stoel* (chair). The name of the second property, *Papenkelder* (monks' cellar), is illustrated in the second capital in the satirical form of monks drinking and eating. The third capital recalls the *De Moor* (the Moor) property with a sleeping figure holding a large scimitar,



Town hall. Sculptures from the 15<sup>th</sup> century:

1. Seated figures or "prophets".
2. Corbel with kneeling confessing woman.
3. Corbel depicting people having an argument.
4. Annunciation on two keystones.
5. Scupstoel capital. [a]

6. Transition corbel between *Scupstoel* and *Papenkelder*. [b]
7. *Papenkelder* capital. [c]
8. *Papenkelder* corbel. [d]
9. Transition corbel between *Papenkelder* and *De Moor*.
10. *De Moor* capital.

(photo L. Nagels © Fondation CIVA Stichting)

a. Capital of the left-hand gallery depicting the former *Scupstoel* property, c. 1450. Original preserved at the City of Brussels Museum. (J. Gelyns © MVB)

b. Corbel under the right-hand gallery providing a link between the section alluding to *Scupstoel* and that devoted to *Papenkelder*: a character holding a chair fights with a monk armed with an enormous book wrapped in a bag. Copy created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (photo by author)

c. Capital in the centre of the right-hand gallery depicting the former *Papenkelder* property (monks' cellar) with groups of monks drinking and eating. Copy created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (photo by author)

d. Corbel under the right-hand gallery depicting the *De Papenkelder* property (monks' cellar) in the form of a monk holding a pitcher in each hand, c. 1450. Original preserved at the City of Brussels Museum. (© KIK-IRPA, Brussels)



Corbel under the tympanum of the portal, c. 1400. A kneeling woman confesses to a priest while a devil seems to be whispering bad advice in her ear. Original preserved at the City of Brussels Museum. (© KIK-IRPA, Brussels)

Drawing attributed to the school of Rogier Van der Weyden depicting the *Scupstoel* capital. (© Met Museum, New York)



surrounded by couples who are most likely an allusion to a harem. Under the gallery, the same themes are taken up on both the corbels affixed to the walls as well as on the keystones (chairs, shovels, monks' heads, Moors' heads). Corbels with a variety of subjects are used in a novel way to link the different themes: in one, a figure holding a chair is fighting a monk with an enormous book wrapped in a bag; in another, a monk shows an open book to a Moor.



a



b



c



d

# A square that reflects the city



The gold-crowned spire that culminates 100 m above the paving stones of Grand Place announced the existence of the city to travellers from afar, who it then lead directly into the heart of the city. Jean-Baptiste Bonnefoy, *Vue de Bruxelles*, c. 1665. © MRBAB

## THE TOWN HALL IN THE CITY

Completed in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the town hall assumed a complex function in which most of the activities of the city were consolidated. While the interior decoration retains only limited vestiges of the medieval period, the structure of the building has changed very little thereby making it easy to imagine its function up to the end of the *Ancien Régime*. Most of the ground floor rooms, which directly adjoin the square, were occupied by administrative offices and other public service desks, the nature of which slowly changed over time: beer, wine, flour, pensions, court registry, lost children, etc.

While the gallery extending in front of each building is reminiscent of the open ground floors of the first town halls, it can also be compared to the lodges of Italian merchants. This covered passage-way situated at the foot of the market probably became a meeting place for traders, like the galleries of the early commodity exchanges such as that in Antwerp.

Connected to the Great Assembly Room and the *Salle du Tribunal*, the balcony or *bretèche* that sits atop the left-hand gallery played a prominent role. From there the City magistrate made announcements to the populace on important decisions and events like the promulgation of new bills and charters, peace treaties, the granting of pardon, etc. During his inauguration, the Duke of Brabant appeared on the balcony and received the oaths of loyalty from the burghers. It was there that kings and queens or important guests watched celebrations held on the square.

The staircase opening under the gallery provides the main access to the first floor. As in the majority of medieval buildings, there is no grand interior staircase; movement between the floors was via spiral staircases housed in the turrets at each corner of the building. The first floor of the building running along the length of the former Rue de l'Étoile / Sterstraat was entirely occupied by the Great Assembly Room (now the Gothic Room) where, just like today, important meetings and official City receptions were held. The adjacent large room, called the *Salle du Tribunal* (now the *Salle des Mariages* or Wedding Room) housed one of the city council's major functions: the right of justice which enabled burghers to be judged by their peers for matters not involving the death penalty. Rogier Van der Weyden, official painter of the City of Brussels, had created a famous series of four large panels to decorate the interior of the building dedicated to the *Justice of Trajan and Herkinbald* (c. 439-1450), which were destroyed during the 1695 bombardment. The marketplace itself served as the setting for the enforcement of sentences, exhibitions or for executions, the most famous of which was the beheading of the Counts of Egmont and Horn in 1568. The first floor of the right-hand building contains smaller rooms which housed the other activities of the City Magistrate.



Town hall. (photo L. Nagels © Fondation CIVA Stichting)

Beheading of the Counts of Egmont and Horn on Grand Place on 5 June 1568. Engraving by F. Hogenberg. © KBR, Cabinet des Estampes



## THE GUILD SQUARE

The guilds, which had wrested more active participation from the municipal authorities in 1421 saw their economic power increase thanks to frequent stays by the Court of Burgundy. Their buildings quickly surrounded the new town hall. The chandlers occupied *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, the cabinetmakers and coopers *Le Sac / Den Sack*, the boatmen *Le Cornet / Den Horen*, the haberdashers *Le Renard / De Vos*, the *Quatre Couronnés* guild *La Colline / Den Heuvel*, the carpenters *Le Pot d'Étain / De Tinnepot* and the painters *Le Pigeon / De Duive*. A short while later, the tailors purchased *La Chaloupe d'Or / Den Gulden Boot* and the tapestry weavers *L'Arbre d'Or / Den Gulden Boom*. In the area immediately surrounding the square, the establishment of craftsmen continued apace with, among others, the headquarters of the belt makers in *La Demi-Lune*, at the entrance to *Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat*, the headquarters of the cutlery makers, *La Tête d'Or / Den Gulden Cop*, at the start of *Rue des Chapeliers / Hoedenmakersstraat* and the former headquarters of the bakers, *Le Corbeau / De Raeve* at the end of *Rue de la Tête d'Or / Guldenhoofdstraat*. The less wealthy guilds, which owned or rented meeting rooms in one or other houses on the square, must also be included. To enable the restructuring of the square, the Magistrate expropriated the properties on its south-eastern side and, in 1441, in agreement with the *Quatre Couronnés* and carpenters guilds, constructed six identical stone and brick masonry houses which can be seen in an engraving depicting the entry of Archduke Ernest in 1594.

The Ommegang procession at the Grand Place in 1615. Detail from a painting by Denys Van Alsloot. From left to right; the *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys*, *Le Marchand d'Or / De Gulden Marchant*, *Le Pigeon / De Duive*, *La Chaloupe d'Or / De Gulden Boot en L'Ange / De Engel*, *Joseph et Anne / Joseph en Anna en Le Cerf-Volant / Het Vliegende Hert*.  
(© Victoria & Albert Museum, London)



Grand Place decorated for the entry of Archduke Ernest into Brussels in 1594. On the left we can see the small *Le Marchand d'Or / De Gulden Marchant* house still made of wood, *Le Pigeon / De Duive*, rebuilt in the Renaissance style in 1533, *La Chaloupe d'Or / Den Gulden Boot* and *L'Ange / Den Engel*, built in a Late Gothic style at the dawn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, followed by *Joseph and Anne* and *Le Cerf-Volant / De Vliegende hert* may all be seen on the left. On the right are six identical stone and brick houses, built by the City in 1441 on the site of the current *Ducs de Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant* houses.  
(© KBR, Réserve Précieuse)

## MAISON DU ROI / BROODHUYS

Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the king had owned a covered bread market in the marketplace, opposite the town hall, where various princely jurisdictions would later be housed. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the central government, in turn, demonstrated its symbolic influence on Grand Place by replacing this dated structure with a prestigious building designed by the most famous architects of the time. It would be known as *Broodhuys* (literally "bread





**La Louve / De Wolvin, house of the Guild of Archers. The building was rebuilt in 1690 after a devastating fire. Today, it is the only house with a façade that predates the 1695 bombardment.**  
 (© KBR, Cabinet des Estampes)

house”) in memory of the building that predated it, or *Maison du Roi*. The building was completely rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century making it difficult to determine the respective role of each architect. In 1504, Antoine Keldermans from Malines drafted an initial set of plans. However, it was not until 1512-1513, almost ten years later, that the previous building would be destroyed. In 1515, construction of the pile foundations had barely begun when Antoine Keldermans, in charge of the works, died, leaving behind a wooden model. The project was then taken over by Louis Van Bodeghem. Too engrossed in his duties for the governor of the Netherlands, Margaret of Austria, who had commissioned him to build, among other things, the remarkable Royal Monastery of Brou in Bourg-en-Bresse (France), he was replaced by Henri Van Pede, the architect responsible for Audenarde town hall. A central tower and *bretèche* were planned - symbols of power that the king most likely did not want the town hall to have the monopoly on - but they were never to come to pass. The project was completed in 1536, resulting in a Late Gothic style building with a number of Renaissance motifs, particularly noticeable in the dormer windows.

The marketplace therefore now had a definitive layout depicting the political organisation of the city and which would not be further modified except by

the gradual replacement of wooden buildings with stone and brick structures throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The building campaign ended in 1690 with the rebuilding of *La Louve / De Wolvin*, the house of the Guild of Archers, the façade of which, designed by the painter Pierre Herbosch, features exceptionally elaborate ornamentation and iconography.



**Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, detail from painting by an unknown artist, final quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.**  
 (© Kasteel van Gaasbeek)

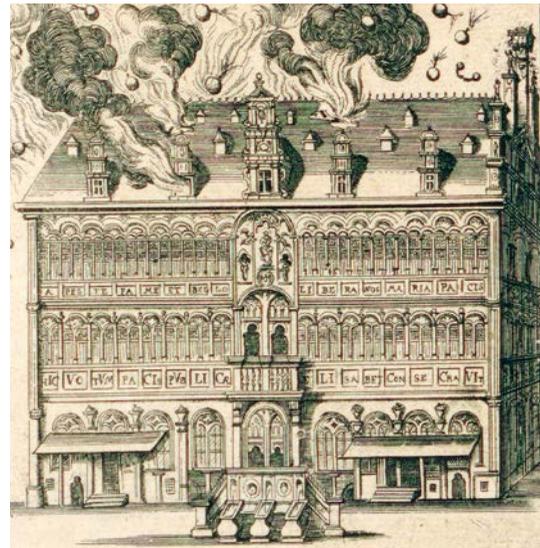
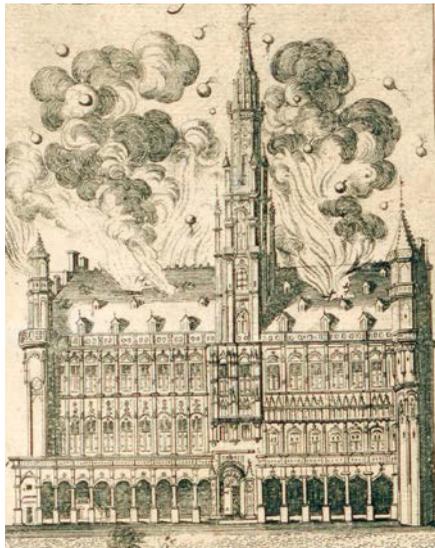
## The 1695 bombardment and Baroque reconstruction

### THE 1695 BOMBARDMENT

These painstaking decorative efforts were suddenly reduced to nothing. Since the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, France had been conducting a policy of gradual invasion of the Spanish Netherlands, annexing an increasing number of cities and territories. In 1692, Louis XIV had personally supervised the taking of Namur, the country's foremost stronghold. Three years later, his army was, in turn, besieged by a vast coalition comprised of the Netherlands, England and various German states. The Sun King then decided, in the mid-summer of 1695, on a bombardment of reprisals and diversion against Brussels. From the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, the French batteries of Marshall de Villeroy, installed on the high ground to the west of the city, rained a deluge of bombs and heated shot down on the heart of the city. Fanned by a strong westerly wind, the fire quickly spread through the lattice of narrow streets surrounding the town hall, still mostly occupied by wooden buildings. By the time the troops withdrew after almost 48 hours of uninterrupted firing, some 5,000 public and private buildings - a third of all buildings in Brussels - had been reduced to ashes or were severely damaged.



**Grand Place during the 1695 bombardment, painting by unknown artist.**  
 (© MVB)



Views of the bombardment of Brussels in 1695. *T'ghebombardeert en t'brandent Brusselen. August 1695*, engraving. © AVB

On 15 August, Mr de Vigny, the French master of artillery wrote "I have been on many tours of duty, but I have never before seen so great a fire or so much desolation as there seems to be in that city."

Situated in the centre of the ruined area, Grand Place was utterly destroyed by the bombardment. All that remained were the walls and tower of the town hall, the skeleton of Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, a series of cellars, as well as the lower portion of a number of stone façades on the north-west-



View of Grand Place from Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat after the 1695 bombardment, engraving by Augustin Coppens. From left to right: the end of the right building of the town hall, the ground floors of *Le Renard / De Vos* and *Le Cornet / Den Horen*, the first floors of *La Louve / De Wolvin*, *Le Sac / Den Sack* and *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, the ruins of the steen where the *Le Roi d'Espagne / Den Coninck van Spaignien* would be built, the tower of the St. Nicholas Church and the side façade of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys*. © AVB



A view of Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt in the direction of Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat and the town hall after the 1695 bombardment, engraving by Augustin Coppens. © AVB

ern side built during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The fire destroyed all of the town hall's artistic treasures, priceless paintings by Rogier Van der Weyden, Michel Coxie, Peter Paul Rubens and Antoine Van Dyck, and almost all of the archives. Apart from the first floors of *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, *Le Sac / Den Sack* and the *La Louve / De Wolvin* buildings, all of the houses in the square had to be completely rebuilt.

### THE REBUILDING OF GRAND PLACE

Very quickly, the authorities succeeded in gaining control of this catastrophic situation, keenly aware of the needs and resources of the population. What might have first appeared irreparable became a collective challenge: the aim was to rebuild and "improve" the city as quickly as possible without succumbing to the mirage of a perfect but distant plan.

The economic and political centre of the city for several centuries, Grand Place immediately became the main architectural focus of the reconstruction. The Magistrate straightaway emphasised the distinctive importance of the site through a series of exceptional measures. Whenever the construction of a new building was announced, he adopted a resolution requiring all plans to be approved by the City Council. At the same time, he initiated a policy of forced relocation and ordered the wealthy Guild of Bakers to sell its house on Rue de la Tête d'Or / Guldenhoofdstraat and take up residence on the square at the corner of Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat. He eliminated the last remaining discontinuities in the alignment of the building façades and publicly denounced delays in completing works. On 24 April 1697, an additional legislative milestone was reached. A global ordinance was enacted controlling



**MOMORDIT LAPIDEM. BRUXELLA A GALLO FRUSTRA IGNE TENTATAE** (He bit a stone. Brussels in vain attacked by the French fire). Reverse of a medal commemorating the bombardment of Brussels and the start of the city's reconstruction, 1696. © KBR, Cabinet des Médailles



**COMBUSTA INTEGRIOR EXSURGO. MDCIVC** (I am risen from the ashes more magnificent than before. 1696). Front face of a medal commemorating the bombardment and the start of reconstruction of Brussels. The symbol of the Phoenix rising from the ashes is also featured on the apex of the *La Louve / De Wolvin* building. © KBR, Cabinet des Médailles

the aesthetic quality of all façades, thereby definitively confirming the exceptional status of Grand Place:

"Whereas it should not be permitted in any way to besmirch the Lower Market of this city with buildings or façades that are overly dissimilar, it being reasonable to harmonise them with each other as much as possible, such being the case, Lieutenant Amman, Mayors, Deputy Mayors, Treasurers, Tax Collectors and Council of the City of Brussels prohibit both property owners and all workers from building façades or houses on the Lower Market without a model of the façade that they intend to construct being first shown to the said persons and confirmed and approved by them, under penalty of a fine of 100 *patacons* to be incurred both by the property owner and the worker on each infringement, which fine shall be enforceable pursuant to this order; in addition, any structure erected contrary to this provision shall be demolished at the offender's expense. Drawn up and published in the presence of the said persons on 24 April 1697."

As early as 1696, the first houses began being built. Visiting Brussels in 1698, the burgher of Lille P.L.J. d'Hailly highlighted the extent of this extraordinary effort in his travel journal: "The bombardment that this city suffered in 1695 woefully damaged it. [...] from a bad event has emerged a good result since it has served to embellish Brussels which will make it one of the most beautiful cities of Europe once it has been entirely rebuilt [...] One cannot imagine anything more magnificent than the great marketplace, with all of its guild houses rebuilt with fully gilt frontispieces, some decorated with statues, others with busts [...] There are some of these guild houses that have cost 30 thousand crowns. The town hall, of which only the walls and tower survived the bombardment, has been almost completely repaired, the side facing the marketplace has been entirely restored [...] after such a disaster, the number of houses that have been rebuilt is astounding."

However, this joint endeavour concealed the divergent concerns of the burghers and the central government. The burghers largely intended to preserve the identity of the city and its social, political, economic and urban planning balance by incorporating anything that would help to make it more beautiful and more convenient.

The young Prince-Elector of Bavaria, Maximilian Emanuel, appointed Governor General of the Spanish Netherlands in 1692, had something very different in mind. The dynastic and political situation in Europe gave him the hope of transforming his office into a hereditary monarchy. Passionate about architecture and conscious of the rhetorical power of Baroque urban planning, he approached

the reconstruction as a remodelling of the city in the service of the princely power. The former marketplace was to embody the presence of central government in the heart of the city of burghers. The architect Guillaume De Bruyn was therefore tasked with assembling individual houses behind grand imposing façades resembling a princely residence decorated with the insignia of the sovereign: an equestrian statue, a globe topped with a crown, a bust surrounded by the Golden Fleece, etc.

In February 1696, the City approved a project combining behind a single façade the six properties on the south-eastern side of the square. With this project, De Bruyn skilfully adapted the characteristics of a traditional terraced house to an imposing composition of the colossal order inspired by the French and Dutch models. The pilastered base was decorated with busts of the Dukes of Brabant evoking the long lineage of the country's sovereign at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Several preserved drawings illustrate the intention to incorporate allegorical figures in the pediment reminiscent of the power of the central government.

In the same year, the City approved a similar plan for all of the properties situated to the right of Maison du Roi, between Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat and Rue des Harengs / Haringstraat. This project proposed a corresponding structure with a central section featuring a rounded pediment crowned with an equestrian statue of the victorious sovereign.

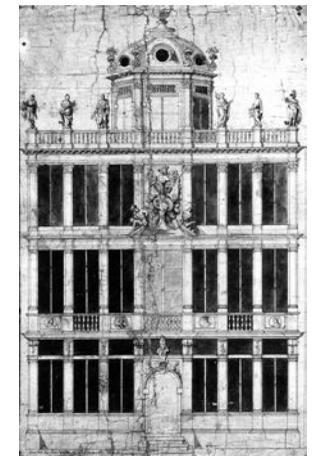
In December 1695, the City Magistrate had ordered the Guild of Bakers to build their new house at the corner of Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat based on a design to be drawn up by the City. On 12 March 1696, another resolution ordered the Guild of Chandlers to demolish the remains of the façade of *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, partially spared by the bombardment, and to rebuild it based on the model of the new house of the Guild of Bakers, *Le Roi d'Espagne / Den Coninck van Spaignien*, situated to its right. These interventions seem to indicate that the north-western side, between Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat and Rue de la Tête d'Or / Guldenhoofdstraat, was also to have a more uniform look.

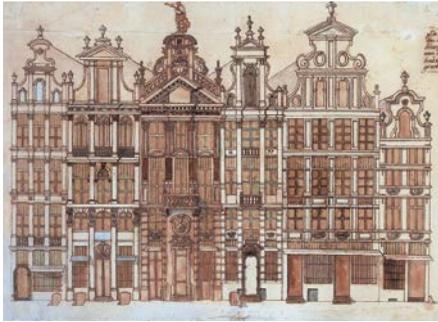
But these imitations of princely palaces, built at the expense of guilds and private individuals whose traditional independence had been



*Les Ducs de Brabant / De hertogen van Brabant complex rebuilt in 1696-1698 based on plans by Guillaume De Bruyn. Watercolour by F.J. De Rons in 1749 showing the original condition of the façade before transformation of the pediment in 1770. © MVB*

*Le Roi d'Espagne / Den Coninck van Spaignien built in 1696-1697, plan by unknown author. © MVB*





The north-eastern side of Grand Place between Rue de la Colline / Heuvelstraat and Rue des Harengs / Haringstraat. Watercolour by F.J. De Rons, early 18<sup>th</sup> century. (© MVB)

The north-eastern side of Grand Place between Rue Chair et Pain / Vlees en Broodstraat and Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat. At the far left is the former house of the Guild of Cobblers, *L'Empereur Léopold / Den Keyzer Leopoldus*, at the entrance to Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat. Watercolour by F.J. De Rons, early 18<sup>th</sup> century. (© MVB)

*L'Arbre d'Or / Den Gulden Boom*, house of the Guild of Brewers. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)



denied them, were soon to be vehemently rejected.

In April 1697, the Guild of Carpenters, owner of the *Pot d'Étain / De Tinnepot*, challenged the obligation to adhere to the plan imposed for the south-eastern side of the square. Pressure from the City Magistrate, invoking the six identical houses built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the specific wishes of the Governor General, finally succeeded in getting them to accept the project. At the same time, there was a lawsuit between the Guild of Tailors, which was completing the rebuilding of *Chaloupe d'Or / Den Gulden Boot d'Or* in accordance with the uniform façade plan for the north-eastern side, and their neighbour, Jan De Vos, owner of *L'Ange / Den Engel* situated to its right. De Vos threatened to destroy all the mouldings on the house of the Tailors overhanging his land pursuant to the master plan. Despite attempts at mediation by Maximilian Emanuel, the case dragged on for several years. It clearly showed the Governor's inability to impose a decision that went against the individualist goals of the local burghers.

After a few years, De Bruyn's project was abandoned once and for all. *L'Ange / Den Engel* and the other façades on the north-eastern side would subsequently be built with gabled roofs like most of the houses on the square. Of the Governor's original ambitions, only the *Dukes of Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant* complex and a large equestrian statue of Maximilian Emanuel, installed in 1697 on the apex of the Brewers' house, the *L'Arbre d'Or / Den Gulden Boom d'Or*, would remain. This was most likely a unique interpretation of the concept then being developed in France and Italy of a royal square with a statue of the sovereign in the centre.

De Bruyn's aborted projects allow for the incredible coherence between the Gothic town hall and the façades of the houses built two-and-a-half centuries later by the city's middle class inhabitants to be understood. This continuity shows an intuitive and creative attachment to an aesthetic that

had seen the height of the guilds' economic power and which probably continued, via the town hall, to symbolise the specific characteristics and independence of the middle class with regard to the central government.

The Gothic tradition can be seen in the vertical flow of the tall, narrow façades, extended by intricately-shaped gables of ever-changing designs. It is also continued in the reduction of the walls to a thin structural framework of supports and entablatures. Within this framework, each house developed an often intense individualism, drawing on a wide variety of sources, rooted not only in the local culture but also open to multiple foreign artistic influences. Several private houses, such as *Joseph and Anne*, *Le Chêne / De Eycke* and *Le Samaritain / De Samaritain* or *Le Paon / Den Pauw* retain a system of slightly projecting horizontal and vertical bands dating back to the Mannerist models of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, and *Le Sac / Den Sack*, the first floors of which survived the bombardment, offer a superposed order characteristic of numerous 17<sup>th</sup> century homes. The façade of *Le Cornet / Den Horen* presents a sculptural quality in the wall surface and a naturalist vigour reminiscent of the Italian Baroque. The decoration of the *Le Renard / De Vos* uses motifs evocative of the French Regency style. The houses designed by De Bruyn, *La Chaloupe d'Or*, *L'Arbre d'Or / Den Gulden Boom* and *L'Ange / Den Engel* adopted a newer structure composed of colossal order of pilasters or columns spanning several storeys. *Le Cygne / De Swane*, with its false-jointed ground floor, pediment and arched roof, appears to be exceptionally inspired by French Classicism. There is a profusion of forms and influences that not only reflects the variety of architects involved, but above all



North-western side of Grand Place, from right to left: *Le Roi d'Espagne / Den Coninck van Spaignien*, *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, *Le Sac / Den Sack*. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

*Le Cornet / Den Horen*, house of the Guild of Boatmen. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

*Chaloupe d'Or / Den Gulden Boot*, house of the Guild of Tailors, detail with the bust of Saint Barbara, patron saint of the craft. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)





The *Grande Boucherie* rebuilt in 1697 by Guillaume De Bruyn (since disappeared). The imposing façade emblazoned with the coat of arms of the King of Spain announced the presence of Grand Place from *Marché aux Herbes / Grasmarkt*. © AVB

reflects a fundamental desire for differentiation already seen in the persistence of the individual gable.

Since the time of the reconstruction, the proliferation of allegories, historical figures, patron saints, emblems, motifs, devices, dates and chronograms has fascinated passersby, like a never-ending story of stone, the elements of which seem to call out to each other from one end of the square to the other. The façade of *La Louve / De Wolvin*, sketched a few years before the bombardment by the painter Pierre Herbosch, offered an extremely elaborate iconography. It undoubtedly had a profound influence on the rebuilding of many houses. The increase in the number of gilded elements

was combined with an infinite rhetoric that exploited all the resources of ancient and modern history, classical mythology, iconology and hagiography in an attempt to confer an extraordinary status on each building.

Originally, each of the guild houses had a richly-decorated meeting room on the first floor containing paintings by the main 18<sup>th</sup> century Brussels painters -Victor-Honoré Janssens, Jan Van Orley, Jacob Van Helmont- which were, unfortunately, destroyed or scattered after the disappearance of the guilds themselves.

### THE REBUILDING OF THE TOWN HALL

The bombardment pitted the City council against a veritable financial black hole. The rebuilding of the town hall would therefore be marked by austerity. The restoration of the exterior is testament to a certain awareness of the value of the old medieval building. The works, which were to be carried out "by creating the new elements in accordance with the Gothic style", do not appear to have altered the appearance of the building much. However, it is likely that certain damaged motifs were eliminated at this time.

The interior was not to recapture its former splendour, with most of the rooms being restored with a limited amount of decoration. However, there were exceptions, including the room on the first floor of the tower, the Deputy Mayors Chamber or *Belle Chambre*, from where foreign guests viewed celebrations held in the square. Covered with elegant panelling stretching out smoothly beneath the old Gothic vault, it testifies, like the houses on the square, to the ease with which the architects behind the

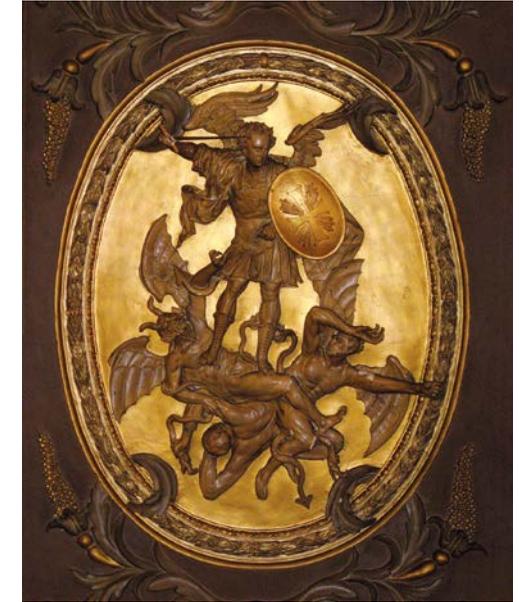


reconstruction were able to combine Classical decoration with medieval heritage. The neighbouring room, where the city council sat (today the David and Bathsheba room) has also retained a beautiful ceiling created after the disaster by the sculptor Marc de Vos based on the theme of Saint Michael.

### THE STATES OF BRABANT BUILDING

The bombardment completely destroyed the cloth market hall and most of the other buildings located behind the town hall. With the cloth trade having declined in importance, the City left construction of a new building up to the States of Brabant, a political entity that roughly encompassed what is now the Region of Brussels and the provinces of Walloon Brabant, Flemish Brabant and Antwerp. The works were supervised by Corneille Van Nerven, one of the architects who embodied the most Classical wave of the reconstruction. Construction of the three buildings, began in 1706 with the embellishment of the interior continuing until around 1720.

Designed in a very understated style, the new building was linked to the old medieval town hall in an interesting way. Rather than opening onto the surrounding dark, narrow streets, the entire structure was laid out around an interior courtyard. The exterior façades do not contain any external entrances apart from a simple elegant porch positioned in the



Town hall, Deputy Mayors Chamber or *Belle Chambre* on the first floor of the tower, restored after the 1695 bombardment. A 1712 painting of the *Crucifixion* by Jan Van Orley hangs above the fireplace. (Y. Peeters © MVB)

*Saint Michael slaying the demon*. Detail from the ceiling of the former Council Room, created by the sculptor Marc de Vos. (Y. Peeters © MVB)



**Town hall, States of Brabant building, interior courtyard, outlook on the rear building.**  
(Y. Peeters © MVB)

**Fountain symbolising the *The Scheldt* in the town hall's interior courtyard, 1715.**  
(Ch. Bastin and J. Evrard © SPRB-GOB)

middle of the rear building. The main entrance is via the entrance to the town hall, "taking advantage" of the imposing nature of the façade and tower. In order to showcase this entrance from the square, particular attention was paid to the design of the back wall of the courtyard. Two symmetrical fountains, sketched by Jean André Anneessens in 1714, symbolise the country's two major rivers in the antique form of an old man leaning over an urn, the *Meuse*, on the left, created by the sculptor Jean De Kinder; and the *The Scheldt*, on the right, by Pierre Denis Plumier.

The main entrance, located in the right building coming from the square, leads, on the first floor, to a succession of six stately rooms that occupy the entire rear building. The first room, the States of Brabant Assembly Room (today converted into the municipal council room) is undoubtedly the best preserved example of early 18<sup>th</sup> century interior decoration in Brussels. Having changed little, it provides an impression, on a more grander scale, of the type of layout and iconography of the meeting rooms in the guild houses following the bombardment. The decor is entirely dedicated to the States of Brabant. On one side of the fireplace can be seen a mitre and cross, symbolising the clergy, and, on the other, a helm and banner symbolising the nobility. Opposite, on the wall panels separating the windows, are the coats of arms of the three main towns that provided representatives to the States: Antwerp, Brussels and Leuven. The ceiling, by the Brussels painter Victor-Honoré Janssens, depicts an *Assembly of the Gods* in which Jupiter holds out a crown in allegory of the Duchy of Brabant. Three Brussels tapestries from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century depict the inauguration of Philip the Good as Duke of Brabant in 1430, the abdication of Charles V in Brussels in 1555 and the inauguration of



**States of Brabant Assembly Room. Detail of the abdication of Charles V in the hall of Coudenberg Palace in 1555, tapestry from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.**  
(© MVB)

**States of Brabant Assembly Room. Ceiling by Victor-Honoré Janssens depicting an *Assembly of the Gods* around an allegory of the Duchy of Brabant.**  
(© MVB)

Charles VI, first sovereign of the House of Austria, in 1717. In order to complete the original structure, it is necessary to imagine, in place of the mirror at the back, a large dais symbolically occupied by a portrait of the sovereign. This sumptuous ornamentation continues in the next three rooms (now the Council room, anteroom, deputy mayor's office) with a series of eight early 18<sup>th</sup> century Brussels tapestries, based on sketches by the French painter Charles Le Brun, on the theme of the History of Clovis. The last room, once occupied by the Court Registry (now the mayor's office), still contains a ceiling, painted by Jan Van Orley, depicting the four main towns of Brabant.



**The States of Brabant Assembly Room, now converted into the municipal council room.**  
(Y. Peeters © MVB)

# Grand Place in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries



Grand Place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing by Gavard, lithograph by Arnout, 1833. The town hall is depicted without sculptures. On the left, *L'Étoile / De Sterre* before its demolition in 1853. On the right, *La Louve / De Wolvin* is depicted without its pediment which was created after 1695. The centre of the square is illuminated by a large street light. © AVB

The period following the French Revolution was one of the darkest in the square's history. The French *sans-culottes* (badge of honor for the revolutionaries) attacked anything and everything connected with the *Ancien Régime*, smashing certain statues in the building façades (often already damaged or having disappeared due to lack of maintenance as a result of the impoverishment of the guilds) and ransacking the guilds' meeting rooms. Sold as state property after the abolition of the guilds, the buildings continued to rapidly deteriorate in the hands of new owners who were little concerned with preserving the dated and fragile decor.

A few decades later, the decision to modernise traffic flow in the centre of the city threatened the very structure of the marketplace itself with its narrow, winding entrances. One

architect envisaged demolishing the houses between *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* and *Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat* in order to create a direct link with the *La Monnaie* theatre. Another wanted to run a covered gallery through the centre of the *Ducs de Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant* building. A third architect simply proposed demolishing the entire square to double its size. However, this was most likely nothing more than a satirical critique of contemporary urban development plans.

The town hall, which housed a growing administration, was not spared. Between 1851 and 1880, a succession of plans were proposed by the municipal council - fortunately abandoned due to a lack of money - to reduce the surface area of the courtyard, raise the height of the rear buildings by one storey, completely rebuilding them in a neo-Gothic style, and expand the

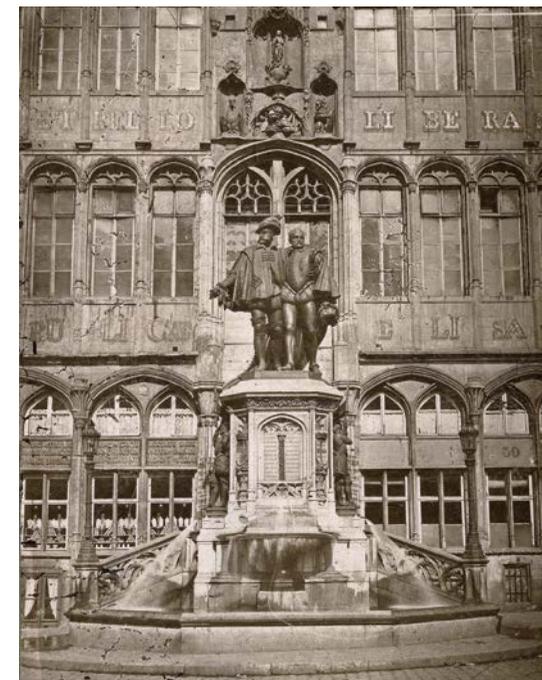
building beyond *Rue de l'Amigo / Vrutstraat*. In 1853, the small *L'Étoile / De Sterre* building was demolished to widen the street running alongside the town hall.

In spite of this, Romantic Europe, passionate about Gothic architecture and the religious conflicts that brought bloodshed to the former Netherlands during the time of Philip II of Spain, gradually rediscovered Grand Place. Goethe and Beethoven celebrated the heroism of Egmont beheaded in 1568; it was a beloved haunt of American historian John Lothrop Motley while he was writing of his famous *History of the United Netherlands*. Victorien Sardou used the square as the setting for his historical drama *Patrie*. Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval and even Charles Baudelaire, in spite of his fierce hatred of Belgium, all, in turn, expressed their enthusiasm for the old square.

Hugo, exiled in Brussels after the 1851 coup d'état, would not have wished for any other setting and took up residence in the *Le Pigeon / De Duyve*, facing the square, which he would recall in *Les Contemplations*:

«Tout ce qui peut tenter un cœur ambitieux  
Était là, devant moi, sur terre et dans les cieux ;  
Sous mes yeux dans l'austère et gigantesque place,  
J'avais les quatre points cardinaux de l'espace,  
Qui fait songer à l'aigle, à l'astre, au flot, au mont,  
Et les quatre pavés de l'échafaud d'Egmont.  
(À Jules J.)»

After the creation of the Kingdom of Belgium in 1830, the desire to glorify the most prestigious remnants of the nation's past led to an increasing awareness of the historical value of these buildings which had been allowed to deteriorate over half a century. This marked the beginning of a conservation movement which would result, successively, in the restoration of the town hall, the renovation of the main guild houses, the rebuilding of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* and the overall preservation of the square, instigated by the mayor and aesthete Charles Buls.



The monument to the Counts of Egmont and Horn created by Charles-Auguste Fraikin (1864). Initially installed in front of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys*, on the spot on which they were beheaded, it was moved to *Square du Petit Sablon / Kleine Zavel* in 1879. © private collection

“Everything capable on earth and in heaven of tempting a hopeful heart was there, before me; Before my eyes in the austere and immense square, were the four cardinal points of space, reminiscent of the eagle, the star, the tide, the mountain, and the four corners of Egmont's chopping block. (To Jules J.)”

## THE RESTORATION OF THE TOWN HALL

### The restoration of the exterior

The systematic restoration of the exterior of the town hall commenced with the renovation of the tower commenced in 1840 under the supervision of Tilman-François Suys. The works were later taken up by the City architect Pierre-Victor Jamaer and continued without interruption until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Relying on scholarly research conducted by contemporary historians and occasionally soliciting the opinion of internationally-renowned experts, such as Eugène Viollet-le-Duc for the restoration of the *Escalier des Lions* (lion staircase), Jamaer sought to recreate a building that was as lush and prestigious as possible. As well as adding certain decorative elements (which, it was assumed, rightly or wrongly, had existed on the original building), the most audacious addition was the progressive installation of an army of

statues on the three exterior façades. These were designed to “enrich” the niches - or what were thought to be the incomplete or damaged vestiges of niches - even though old documents showed that the façades only ever had a very small number of large statues: a number on the first floors of the tower and on the first floor of the turret on the corner of Rue de la Tête d’Or / Guldenhoofdstraat.

Started in 1845, this massive programme of decoration for the façades continued until the cusp of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and resulted in the creation of almost 300 full-length figures. The project commenced at the doorway which features a number of remarkable statues by Charles-Auguste Fraikin (tympantum and allegories on the pillars); it continued with the façades of the two buildings oriented towards the square which contain a long line of figures depicting the vast family tree of sovereigns who reigned between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries over the territory corresponding to the Brabant, from Pepin of Landen (2<sup>nd</sup> floor on the left) to Ferdinand I of Habsburg, brother of Charles V (1<sup>st</sup> floor on the right). Next came the long façade towards Rue de l’Étoile / Sterstraat, dedicated, from 1885, to representatives of the city council in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by the side façade towards Rue de la Tête d’Or / Guldenhoofdstraat which is home to a selection of fifteen renowned personages from the world of arts and culture in the Brabant. These include such figures as the painters Rogier Van der Weyden and Bernard Van Orley, the

In 1866, P.-V. Jamaer decided to restore the *Escalier des Lions*, which extended beneath the façade’s left-hand gallery, to its original condition. He replaced the two pillars with large pendant keystones suspended in air, like those depicted in various old images. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

The *Escalier des Lions*. The left pendant keystone depicts the assassination of Deputy Mayor Everard ‘t Serclaes, killed in 1388 by soldiers of the Lord of Gaasbeek, in which the devil can be seen carrying off his soul in the lower section. (photo by author)



**Allegory of Peace** by Charles-Auguste Fraikin to the right of the doorway. (D. Langendries © AVB)

**Allegory of Prudence** by Charles-Auguste Fraikin to the right of the doorway. Sculpted from relatively soft stone, the statues of Peace and Prudence were recreated by Fraikin in 1888. (D. Langendries © AVB)

**A. de Grimberghe** by Égide Rombaux, side façade Rue Charles Buls / Karel Bulsstraat, c. 1885-1892. (D. Langendries © AVB)

physician Andreas Vesalius, the architects Louis Van Bodeghem and Jacques Francart. A desire to showcase the medieval building (by implicitly associating decorative opulence with a concern for aesthetics) was therefore combined with the passion for history and educational public statuary characteristic of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With the statues created for the restoration of the houses and those that decorate the *Maison du Roi* / Broodhuys, these orders, which were spread over several generations of artists, would result in Grand Place becoming a vast extraordinary museum of 19<sup>th</sup> century Belgian sculpture, where remarkable works by Paul de Vigne, Albert Desenfans, Julien Dillens, Paul Du Bois, Charles-Auguste Fraikin, Jef Lambeaux, Constantin Meunier, Georges Minne, Pierre Puyenbroeck, Egide Rombaux, Charles Samuel and Thomas Vincotte stand alongside each other. A careful programme of cleaning and restoration, conducted from 1997 to 1998 by the municipal architect Francis Dardenne, has allowed for the value of this little known heritage to be brought to the fore.

**Saint Sebastian**, sculpture on the tympanum of the doorway by Charles-Auguste Fraikin, c. 1855. (D. Langendries © AVB)

**Zwentibold** by Constantin Meunier, left building of main façade, 1863. (D. Langendries © AVB)



## Renovation of the interior

Inside, the new town council that took up residence in the town hall after 1830 was faced with a paradoxical state of affairs. The rooms of the old Gothic building, the most prestigious part, were relatively basic in appearance and in poor condition, while the rear section, once occupied by the States of Brabant, contained opulently-decorated rooms that were devoid of any reference to the municipal power. The long campaign of renovation initiated by Jamaer in 1860 would therefore follow a complex programme. It would involve preserving the early 18<sup>th</sup> century staterooms by repurposing them, decorating the other rooms in the rear building in a similar style, coupled with a more specifically Brussels or patriotic colour-scheme and restoring the old medieval section with a luxurious neo-Gothic or neo-Renaissance layout.

The project involved reorganising the corridors and flow of traffic. It revolved around a new grand staircase, positioned in a secondary building to the left of the inner courtyard, which would enable immediate presentation of the historical and symbolic references that the City wished to highlight. Upon entering, visitors are greeted by an enormous bronze statue of *Saint Michael slaying Satan*, created by Charles Van der Stappen. They then pass into a stairwell with wall paintings by Jacques de Lalaing, entirely dedicated to the exaltation of the city council. On the first floor, the new entrance route gives direct access to the main rooms in the building: the Gothic Room and Wedding Room towards Grand Place and the Mayor's

**Gothic room, latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is decorated with Mechelen tapestries depicting the old crafts and guilds of Brussels.**  
(Y.Peeters, 2003 © MVB)

**Council room or Maximilian Room. It retains four 18<sup>th</sup> century tapestries dedicated to the History of Clovis, created in Brussels based on sketches by Charles Le Brun.**  
(© protocole, 2004 City of Brussels)



**Mayor's Office.** The decor was completely renovated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, except for the ceiling which was created in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
(Y.Peeters, 2003 © MVB)

**Statue of Saint Michael slaying Satan** by Charles Van der Stappen, positioned at the entrance to the town hall's new grand staircase, 1893. Model preserved at the City of Brussels Museum.  
(© MVB)

Office, former Grangé Gallery and other 18<sup>th</sup> century rooms towards Rue de l'Amigo / Vrunstraat. Between the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> and dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the decor of the town hall was completed with the acquisition of valuable ancient works, including a remarkable collection of Brussels tapestries from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Salle des Mariages (Wedding room), latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century.**  
(Y.Peeters, 2003 © MVB)

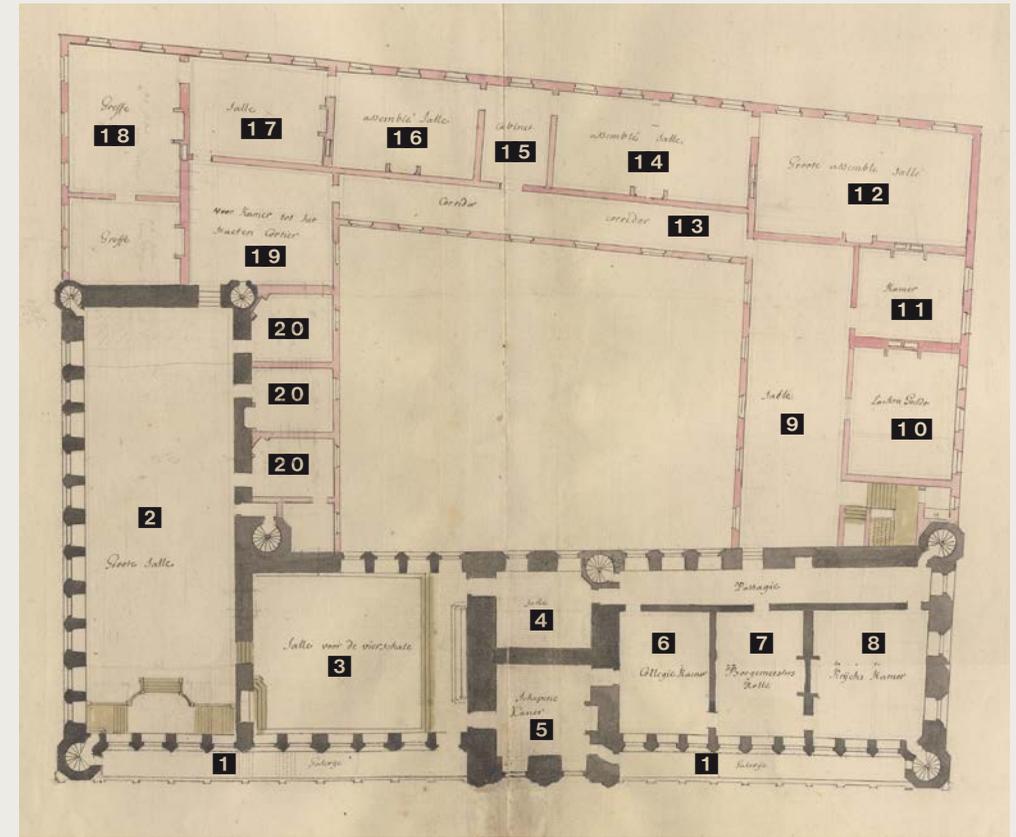




Plans of town hall c. 1760.  
©AVB

Ground floor

- A. Grand Place
- B. Rue de la Tête d'Or / Guldenhoofdstraat
- C. Rue de l'Amigo / Vrontstraat
- D. Former Rue de l'Étoile / Sterstraat, now Rue Charles Buls / Karel Bulsstraat
- 1. Inner courtyard
- 2. Porch under the tower
- 3. Galleries
- 4. The Escalier des Lions staircase
- 5. The Meuse fountain
- 6. The Scheldt fountain



First floor

(indications in italics correspond to current uses)

Gothic building (in gray)

- 1. Balconies
- 2. Great City Assembly Room / Gothic Room
- 3. Tribunal Room / Salle des Mariages
- 4. Room / Anteroom
- 5. Deputy Mayors Chamber or Belle Chambre / Deputy mayor's office
- 6. City Council Chamber / Deputy mayor's office called the David and Bathsheba Room
- 7. Mayors' Chamber / Deputy mayor's office
- 8. War Council Chamber / Deputy mayor's office

States of Brabant building (in red)

- 9. Room / Hall
- 10. Clothworkers Guild Room / Deputy mayor's office
- 11. Chamber / Deputy mayor's office
- 12. Great Assembly room of the States of Brabant / City council room
- 13. Grangé Gallery
- 14. Assembly Room / City Council or Maximilian Room
- 15. Office / Anteroom
- 16. Assembly Room / Deputy mayor's office
- 17. Room / Deputy mayor's office called the Salle du Gouvernement provisoire (Provisional Government's Room)
- 18. Court registry of the States of Brabant / Mayor's office
- 19. Antechamber / Mayor's antechamber
- 20. Public desks replaced by the Grand staircase



Grand staircase, first floor.  
(Y. Peeters, 2003 © MVB)

The series of allegorical paintings on the grand staircase created by Jacques de Lalaing culminates in the vault on the first floor which depicts the belfry of the town hall being defended by all of the city's forces against plague, famine and war.  
(Y. Peeters, 2003 © MVB)



### THE REBUILDING OF MAISON DU ROI / BROODHUYS

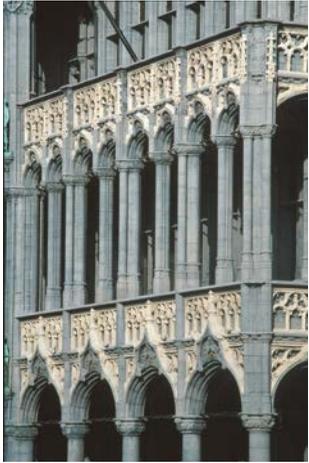
Maison du Roi / Broodhuys undoubtedly the building on the square that has experienced the most turbulent history. Depictions from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century show a late Gothic style building that seems incomplete, crowned by a single side gable on the right and Renaissance style dormer windows. Crudely restored after the 1695 bombardment, it was more comprehensively reorganised in 1767, receiving a new Classical doorway and large roof punctuated by three small oval-shaped *œil-de-bœuf* windows. While, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Gérard de Nerval was still able to compare it to "a sombre Venetian or Florentine palace", towards 1860-1870, this combination of styles seemed increasingly out of place when compared with the town hall, then undergoing restoration.

Adopting the unity of style principle advocated by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, Jamaer chose to recreate a coherent late Gothic building. He removed the render to study the old stonework, prepared detailed survey plans, had certain details moulded, carefully removed the best preserved decorative elements and then, faced with the technical complexity of a restoration on sig-

nificantly altered foundations, he demolished the structure with rebuilding commencing in 1876. Even though it had been decided, prior to the start of the works, to rebuild exclusively based on the still standing remains of the structure, the project was soon modified. Basing his design on tooting stones discovered in the wall of the façade and a report from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, which mentioned the construction of a tower and gallery, he decided to "complete" the façade of the building with two gallery levels and a central tower crowned by an onion dome roof. He did not have to look too far for a model. Architect Henri Van Pede, commissioned to complete the Maison du Roi / Broodhuys building in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, had adopted a similar combination for the town hall of Audenarde which would serve as a persistent reference for Jamaer's work. The exterior decoration contains some fifty elegant gilded metal statues that bring together some of the



Maison du Roi / Broodhuys.  
(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2013 © SPRB-GOB)



Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, detail.  
(Ch. Bastin and J. Evrard © SPRB-GOB)

country's main sovereigns (main façade), figures recalling the institutions that once occupied the building (side façades) and, on the roofs, a series of heralds "proclaiming the nobility and power of the Municipality" (Ch. Buls). The "new" Maison du Roi / Broodhuys was not solely designed to enhance the architectural decor of Grand Place. From 1884, Charles Buls proposed installing a municipal museum in the building which would enable the preservation of the remnants and records of the old city, which were disappearing at a rapid pace, and, in this way, contribute to its appreciation and conservation. Officially opened in 1887, it offers invaluable documentation on the history of Grand Place, particularly the original Gothic sculptures from the town hall, the engravings depicting the city after the 1695 bombardment as well as the watercolours from the houses on Grand Place painted by De Rons in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century which served as references for the restorations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Maison du Roi / Broodhuys,  
detail of the main façade.  
(Ch. Bastin and J. Evrard © SPRB-GOB)

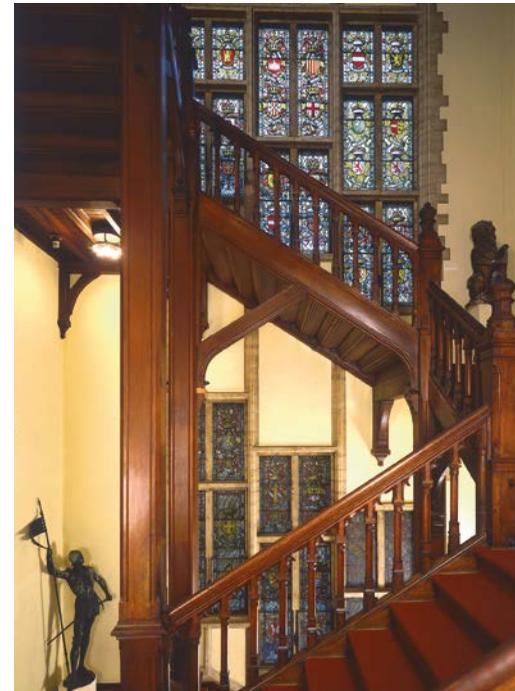


Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, heralds on the roofs.  
(© HHUCB)



Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, second floor.  
(V. Everarts © MVB)

Maison du Roi / Broodhuys, staircase.  
(J.J. Rousseau © MVB)



Julien Dillens, homage by the City of Brussels to the architect Pierre-Victor Jamaer, responsible for the restoration of the town hall and the rebuilding of Maison du Roi, 1895. The ivory statuette is holding models of the old and new Maison du Roi / Broodhuys.  
(© MVB)



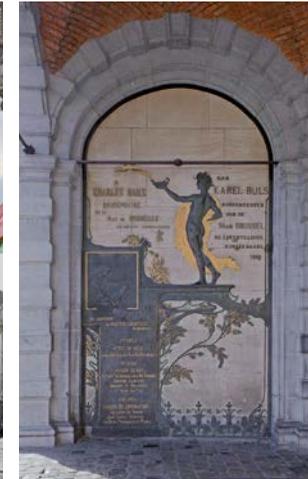


Charles Buls (1837-1914). Mayor from 1881 to 1909, passionate about history and urban design, he focused his activities on preserving the traditional town and promoting secular education. In 1893, he published *City Aesthetics* ranking him among the main urban planning theorists of his time alongside his friends Camillo Sitte and Josef Stübben. His opposition to King Leopold II's plans for the development of the *Montagne de la Cour / Hofberg*, where he wanted to limit any demolitions, led to his resignation as mayor in 1899. (Fondation CIVA Stichting)

## CHARLES BULS AND THE RENAISSANCE OF GRAND PLACE

The principle of preserving Grand Place as a whole, which marked a shift from the notion of the isolated historical monument to that of the urban landscape, was only established very gradually.

The early 1850s are likely to have signalled a decisive turning point. After the *L'Étoile / De Sterre* building was demolished, the city council gradually committed itself to a policy of preserving the most significant private buildings. It decided to award a grant for the restoration of the busts of the *Dukes of Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant* complex, the caryatids of the *Le Sac / Den Sack* and some of the elements from *La Louve / De Wolvin* in 1851-1852, for the façade of the *Le Sac / Den Sack* building in 1856-1858 and for the allegories of *La Louve / De Wolvin* in 1871. In 1852, it also financed the creation of a new statue of Prince Charles Alexander of Lorraine on the top of the *L'Arbre d'Or / Den Gulden Boom*. A more comprehensive programme was launched in 1879 under the supervision of Pierre-Victor Jamaer. However, it was not until the decisive impetus provided by the mayorship of Charles Buls (1881-1899), passionate about the history and urban design of the old city, that a coherent, systematic policy would be seen. In 1883, the new mayor got approval for an easement that was going to be instrumental in the theprotection of the square: the City would finance and supervise restoration of the façades in exchange for a modest annual contribution from the owner calculated per running metre of the façade. The agreement prohibited “the carrying out of any work on the façade, the affixing of any sign or banner; the attachment or suspension of any object and, generally, the effecting of any work resulting in any type of alteration...” without the permission of the City. Accepted by the majority of property owners, it enabled a rapid conservation and improvement programme, the jewel of which was the complete restoration of the six houses comprising the *Ducs de Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant* complex, completed in 1892. Nevertheless, the owners of certain buildings remained intransigent. On 6 August 1894, Charles Buls therefore proposed approving, for the first time in Belgium, the principle of expropriating, for reasons of aesthetic interest, houses that could not be restored by other means. This threat of expropriation was sufficient to convince the remaining property owners to accept the City agreement. The time was ripe to rebuild *L'Étoile / De Sterre*, the façade of which was carefully restored but for the the ground floor which was replaced by a colonnade (1897-1898). In July 1897, the mayor was finally able to symbolically celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the reconstruction of the houses of Grand Place after the bombardment.



The reconstruction of the *L'Étoile / De Sterre* in a form identical to the original, but replacing the ground floor with a colonnade, was considered an optimal compromise in professional and artistic circles between preserving an historical site and the requirements of the contemporary flow of traffic. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2009 © SPRB-GOB)

To Charles Buls Mayor of the City of Brussels The grateful artists. 1899. In the centre, a youth holds a lamp, a symbol of rebirth and immortality. On the left, an allegory of Architecture with a compass and unfurled plan stands out in front of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys*. The plaque is decorated with black locust branches, a Masonic symbol that discretely alludes to the mayor's philosophical beliefs. (A. de Ville de Goyet © SPRB-GOB)

A few months later, a group of artists launched a subscription to finance a token of gratitude for Charles Buls. A commemoration plaque, created by the sculptor Victor Rousseau and the architect Victor Horta, combining the mayor and main architects of Grand Place in a single tribute, was installed under the arcades of *L'Étoile / De Sterre* and inaugurated in December 1899.

Unfortunately, the last stage in the programme of Charles Buls, the conservation and careful restoration of the old streets comprising the natural environment of Grand Place, was not carried out. The classification of the area as a World Heritage Site in December 1998 conferred the project with indisputable moral, intellectual and legal authority.



Monument to Everard 't Serclaes by the sculptor Julien Dillens, installed under the colonnade of the *L'Étoile / De Sterre*, 1898-1902. Deputy mayor of the city, 't Serclaes is associated with several episodes in the history of 14<sup>th</sup> century Brussels. In 1388, he was attacked by envoys from the Lord of Gaasbeek and transported dying to the *L'Étoile / De Sterre*, headquarters of the sovereign's representative in the city. (A. de Ville de Goyet, 2016 © SPRB-GOB)

## RESTORATION OF THE FAÇADES

Under an agreement drawn up in 1883, maintenance of the façades of the houses on Grand Place were the responsibility of the city council. The listing of the façades in 1977, followed by the expansion of this protection to the structures and certain interior elements did not alter this. The City remains the main entity responsible for proper management of the site.

After the major restoration campaign in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - which in fact drew to a close in the interwar period -, it would not be until the World Expo of 1958 that a new series of targeted interventions on the façades of Grand Place would be seen.

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the town hall was progressively cleaned with some of the statues on its façades also being replaced during this time.

The effort resumed in the second half of the 1980s with the restoration of the sweeping façade of the *Ducs de Brabant / Hertogen van Brabant*, followed by major work on the upper parts of the façade of *Le Cornet / Den Horen* as well as occasional maintenance.

The 1990s were an opportunity for more significant work on the town hall, with two ambitious projects being carried out in succession: the restoration of the octagonal openwork tower - the climax of which was the installation of an identical copy of the statue weather vane of Saint Michael on the spire's summit - and the cleaning and consolidation of the façades and statues that decorated it. The Neo-Gothic façades of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* were also cleaned at this point.

In 1998, the City invested in a series of studies culminating in the publication of a detailed monograph of the houses of Grand Place. International recognition of Grand Place as a World Heritage Site in December of the same year was an opportunity for the City to draw up a series of action plans and initiate various projects while establishing the basis

for a comprehensive study of Grand Place and its surroundings. A further phase of façade restoration was initiated in 2003, coming to an end in 2016.

This last campaign of restoration was based on a strict methodology. After an initial assessment, which helped home in on the key damages affecting this special heritage, scientific and technical analyses were ordered to identify the types of stone, render and mortar as well as the paints and gilding used. An analysis of the façades *in situ*, combined with a study of the archives, helped to understand the share of original elements still intact and the restoration techniques employed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century campaign. The guidelines for a new method of intervention were derived from this analysis, mainly consisting of a long-term conservation approach in order to avoid regular and temporary repairs. During the most recent successfully completed projects, this involved cleaning and consolidating the stones of the façade and limiting repairs and replacements as much as possible, while ensuring the overall harmony of the facing once the works were completed. The underlying metal structures, for the most part integrated in the masonry during the campaign of restoration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were treated or replaced. The woodwork, which was restored so as to preserve most of the existing elements, was varnished in the original manner based on the findings of preliminary surveys. The render, polychrome elements and gilded highlights were restored based on their known condition at the time of the reference period used: that of the campaign of restoration from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

HHUCB

Grande Place,  
craftsmen at work on the restoration  
of the façades: 2008-2016.  
(HHUCB)





# The houses of Grand Place



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

## 1. Le Roi d'Espagne - Den Coninck Van Spaignen

House of the Bakers' Guild built on land purchased in 1696; dated from 1697 according to the chronograms on the façade. In the centre of the second storey is a bust of the King of Spain, Charles II, surrounded by war trophies and two prisoners. Above the door is a bust of Saint Aubert, the patron saint of bakers, with the chronogram *hIC qVanDo VIXIt Mlra In paVperes pletate eLVXIt* (He distinguished himself during his life by an admirable compassion for the poor). On the entablature on the first floor is another chronogram *haeC statVIt plstor VICtrICla slgna trophael qVo CaroLVs pLena LaVDe seCVnDVs oVat* (The Bakers place these victorious emblems of the trophy by which Charles II triumphs with the greatest glory). Originally a double-structure house, it consisted of the guild building on the left and, to the right of the entrance, a separate rental property called *Saint-Jacques*. The building was entirely rebuilt by A. Samyn in 1900-1902 based on old drawings of the façade, but without respecting the original inte-

rior structure.. Restored in 2014-2015. At the entrance to Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat stands a complex of four pilastered houses built on the same site by the guild: *the Seven Lineages, Saint Michael, Saint Gudula and 'T Serhuyskensteen*.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

## 2-3. La Brouette - Den Cruywagen

House of the Chandlers' Guild since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Built from stone in 1644, part of the façade survived the 1695 bombardment. It was restored in 1697 under the supervision of the sculptor Jean Cosyn to whom the design of the gable is attributed. Emblems on the cartouches on the first floor; date on the cartouches on the second floor; statue of Saint Giles, patron saint of chandlers, in the gable. The left door gave access to a lane leading to Rue au Beurre / Boterstraat. Restored in 1894-1913 and again in 2014-2015.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

## 4. Le Sac - Den Sack

House of the Guild of Carpenters and Cabinetmakers since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Built from stone in 1644, part of the façade survived the 1695 bombardment. The third storey and gable were rebuilt in 1697 by the architect and cabinetmaker Antoine Pastorana. Emblem above the doorway, date on the gable. Restored in 1854-1858 and 1907-1913 and again in 2014-2015.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

## 5. La Louve - De Wolvin

House of the Guild of Archers. Built in 1690 based on a plan by the painter Pierre Herbosch, almost all of the façade remained standing after the 1695 bombardment. Only the pediment was replaced by a horizontal cornice in 1696. City architect P.-V. Jamaer rec-

reated how it appeared prior to the bombardment with a pediment in 1890-1892. Emblem with Romulus and Remus being suckled by a she-wolf above the doorway; railings bearing the names of the patron saints of archers, Saints Anthony and Sebastian, in interlaced letters. On the second floor are four allegories accompanied by devices on the entablature: *Truth* with the words *Firmamentum imperii* (the empire's support), *Falsity* with *Insidiae status* (the pitfalls of the state), *Peace* with *Salus generis humani* (the salvation of humanity) and *Discord* with *Eversio republicae* (the ruin of the republic). There are medallions of Roman emperors and trophies corresponding to four allegories on the third floor: *Trajan* with a sun illuminating the *World* for *Truth*, *Tiberius* with a cage and net for *Falsity*, *Augustus* with a globe for *Peace*, *Cesar* with a bloody heart and two crossed torches for *Discord*. On the pediment is a statue of *Apollo pursuing the serpent Python* with his arrows. On the summit of the façade, a *Phoenix rising from the ashes*. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century restoration, the chronogram referring to the 1691 construction was replaced: *CoMbVsta Inslgnlor resVrreXI eXpensls sebastlanae gVLDae* (Burned, I arise yet more glorious with the aid of Sebastian's Guild). Restored in 2014-2015.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 6. Le Cornet - Den Horen

House of the Boatmen's Guild since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Rebuilt in 1697 by Antoine Pastorana who designed a gable shaped like the stern of a ship. Emblem in the centre of the façade. On the third floor, a divinity is surrounded by two hippocampi. The pediment contains a medallion of Charles II of Spain surrounded by four winds and two sailors. Restored between 1855 and 1902. Repair of upper sections in 1987-1990 and restoration of the façade in 2014-2015.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 7. Le Renard - De Vos

House of the Haberdashers' Guild since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, rebuilt in 1699. Emblem above the doorway; four bas-reliefs on the mezzanine allude to the products

sold by the guild. On the first floor are allegories of the four continents from where the precious products were sourced; they frame a statue of Justice holding a scales with the motto *Pondere et Mensura* (by weight and measure). There is a date and statue of Saint Nicholas, patron saint of haberdashers, on the pediment. Restored in 1879-1885 and again in 2014-2015.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 8. L'Étoile - De Sterre

Private home rebuilt after the 1695 bombardment. In the Middle Ages, it was occupied by the Amman, the sovereign's representative in the city. Demolished in 1853 to widen Rue de l'Étoile / Sterstraat, it was rebuilt in 1897 on the initiative of Mayor Charles Buis with the ground floor being replaced with a colonnade. Emblem on the apex of the gable. Restored in 2007-2008.

Under the portico is the commemoration plaque for Charles Buis created by the sculptor Victor Rousseau and the architect Victor Horta in 1899. Beside it, the Monument in memory of Everard 't Serclaes, alderman of Brussels who died in the *L'Étoile / De Sterre* house in 1388, created in 1898-1902 by the sculptor Julien Dillens. Restored in 2015-2016.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 9. Le Cygne - De Swane

House rebuilt in 1698 for the financier Pierre Fariseau whose monogram features in the centre of the façade. Emblem above the doorway; date in the cartouches below the last floor. It was acquired by the Guild of Butchers in 1720 who made a number of modifications. This work is recalled by the chronogram placed on the pedestal that sits atop the pediment *haeC DoMVs Lanea eXalTatVr* (this house was built with the profits from wool) listing a date of 1720.

Restored between 1895 and 1904 and again in 2007-2008. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it was used for meetings of the *Deutsche Arbeiterverein* (General German Workers' Association) for whom Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels gave numerous speeches during their stay in Brussels. In 1885, it hosted the conference at which the Belgian Labour Party was founded.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 10. L'Arbre d'or - Den Gulden Boom

House of the Guild of Brewers rebuilt in 1697-1698 by the architect Guillaume De Bruyn. Originally an equestrian statue of Maximilian Emanuel of Bavaria, Governor General of the country at the time of the bombardment, sat atop the building, accompanied by the chronogram *DVX baVler brVXeLLensVM saLVs* (the Duke of Bavaria salutes the residents of Brussels) giving the date of 1696. Sculpted from poor quality stone, in 1705 it was replaced by a bronze statue and then, in 1752, by an effigy of Governor Charles of Lorraine which was recreated in 1853 and 1900. The second story contains three reliefs depicting grape harvests, the transportation of beer and the harvesting of hops. Restored in 1901 and 2007-2008.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 11. La Rose - De Roose

Private home rebuilt in 1702 for J.B. 't Serstevens. There is an emblem above the doorway and a date in the centre of the façade. Restored in 1884-1888 and 2007-2008.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 12. Le Mont Thabor - Den Bergh Thabor

Private home rebuilt in 1699 for J.B. Van de Putte by the carpenter F. Timmermans and the stonemason P. De Roy. Restored in 1885-1889 and again in 2007-2008. Today, it is called "Aux Trois Couleurs" (The Three Colours).

### 12A. Alseberg

A large house at the entrance to Rue des Chapeliers / Hoedenmakersstraat rebuilt in 1699 for Adrien de Vleeschouwer on a site destroyed by the bombardment and purchased in the same year. The date is shown in the cartouches on the last floor. Restored in 1895-1908 and again in 2012. Today called "Le Roi de Bavière" (the King of Bavaria).

### 13-19. Maison des Ducs de Brabant - Huis van de Hertogen van Brabant

A group of seven houses rebuilt with a single imposing façade designed by the architect Guillaume De Bruyn in 1696-1698. The base of the pilasters contains nineteen busts of former Dukes of Brabant. The curved pediment was originally pierced by dormer windows and crowned by volutes. It was modified by the architect Laurent Benoît Dewez in 1770 and decorated with an allegory of *Prosperity* depicting Minerva and Ceres on a chariot as well as *putti* erecting a structure,

most likely an allusion to the guild that once occupied one of the houses. The complex was restored between 1881 and 1892 and again between 1986 and 1990.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 13. La Renommée - De Faem

A single building bay giving access to a rear house. There is an emblem statue above the door.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 14. L'Ermitage - De Cluyse

Former City-owned property purchased by a private individual, Jean Van der Meulen, in 1696. There is an emblem above the door.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 15. La Fortune - De Fortuine

Former City-owned property purchased by a private individual, Pierre De Broyer, in 1696. There is an emblem above the door.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 16. Le Moulin à vent - De Windmolen

Former City-owned property purchased by the Guild of Millers in 1697. There is an emblem in the central part of the façade on the first floor.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

### 17. Le Pot d'étain - De Tinnepot

House of the Carpenters' Guild. There is an emblem above the door.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 18. La Colline - Den Heuvel

House of the Quatre Couronnés Guild (sculptors, stonemasons, masons and slate roofers). There is an emblem above the door.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 19. La Bourse - De Borse

Former City-owned property purchased by a private individual, Adrien de Vleeshouwer, in 1697. There is an emblem in the central part of the façade on the first floor.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © SPRB-GOB)

### 20. Le CerfVolant - De Vliegende Hert

A private home purchased in 1707 by the stonemason and architect G. Van den Eynde who designed the façade. The name and date 1710 are depicted in the cartouches. Restored in 1896-1899 and 2011-2012.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

### 21-22. Joseph et / en Anne

Two private homes rebuilt behind a single façade after the 1695 bombardment. The names of the houses are depicted in the cartouches on the first floor. The gable, which was destroyed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was rebuilt in 1896-1899 based on an early 18<sup>th</sup> century design by De Rons. Restored in 2011-2012.



(photo of the author)

### 23. L'Ange - Den Engel

Private home of the porcelain merchant Jean De Vos, rebuilt in 1697 based on a design by Guillaume De Bruyn. The date is featured on the top floor. The façade, disfigured in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was rebuilt in 1897 based on an early 18<sup>th</sup> century design by De Rons. Restored in 2011-2012.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

### 24-25. La Chaloupe D'Or - De Gulden Boot

House of the Tailors' Guild rebuilt in 1697 by Guillaume De Bruyn. In the architect's original plan, the building was to have been the centre of an imposing façade occupying the entire north-eastern side but the idea was rejected. Above the doorway sits a bust of Saint Barbara, patron saint of the guild. The pediment contains a chronogram *qVas fVror hostlls sVbVererat lgnlbVs aeDes sartor restaVrat praeDlbVsqVe DICat* (The house that the rage of the enemy destroyed with fire, the tailors rebuild and dedicate to the Magistrate) giving the date of 1696. A statue of Saint Boniface, patron saint of tailors, sits atop the roof. Restored in 1879-1880, 1898-1899 and again in 2011-2012.



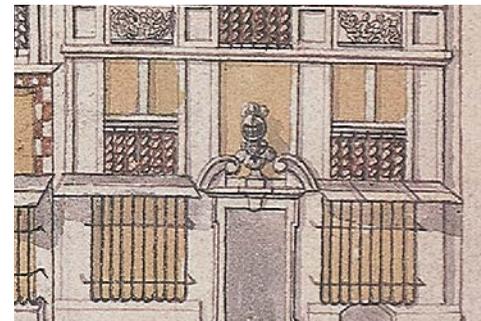
(photo of the author)

### 26-27. Le Pigeon - De Duive

Former property of the Guild of Painters which was purchased in 1697 by the stonemason and architect Pierre Simon who most likely designed the façade behind which two houses were developed. Restored in 1901-1908. While exiled in Brussels, Victor Hugo resided there in 1852. Restored in 2011-2012.

### 28. Le Marchand d'or - De Gulden Marchant

The private home of the potter Corneille Mombaers was rebuilt in 1709. Previously called "La Chambrette de l'Amman" (the Amman's chamber), it is now called "Aux Armes de Brabant" (The Brabant Arms). Restored in 1896-1899 and 2011-2012.



(© MSB)

### 34. Le Heume - Den Helm

The private home of N. Dijs rebuilt after 1695. The door was originally positioned in the centre and topped by a helmed head. Restored in 1916-1923 and 2015-2016.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

### 35. Le Paon - Den Pauw

The private home of M. de Lens rebuilt in 1697. There is an emblem above the door and a date below the gable. Restored in 1876-1895 and 2015-2016.

### 36-37. Le Samaritain et Le Chêne - De Samaritaen en Den Eycke

Two private homes rebuilt under a single entablature in 1696. The date is indicated below the cornice. Restored in 2015-2016.

### 38. Sainte Barbe - Sint Barbara

A private home rebuilt in 1696. The date was originally indicated under the gable. Restored in 1913-1920 and 2015-2016.

### 39. L'Âne - Den Ezel

Private home. The centre of the façade originally contained an emblem. Restored in 1913-1920 and 2003-2004.

## RUE AU BEURRE / BOTERSTRAAT

### 42. L'Empereur Léopold - Den Keyzer Leopoldus

A house rebuilt after 1695 by the Cobblers' and Currier and Cordwainers' Guild. The decoration on the façade, since vanished, was completely devoted to German Emperor Leopold I. There was a bust above the door, coats of arms on the first floor and a monogram topped with a crown and surrounded by atlases on the gable.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

### 24. La Balance - De Balance

House rebuilt in 1704. The central bay window on the first floor contains a sculpted emblem. This particularly elaborate façade has historically been connected to the architectural ensemble of Grand Place. Restored in 1890.

## RUE DE LA TÊTE D'OR / GULDENHOOFDSTRAAT

### 3. Le Corbeau - De Raeve

Former property of the Guild of Bakers, it was purchased and rebuilt by G. Priens in 1696. The date is indicated on the second floor. The blue stone ground floor dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Restored in 1954.



(A. de Ville de Goyet, 2015 © GOB)

## RUE DE LA COLLINE / HEUVELSTRAAT

### 22. La Demi-lune - De Halff Maene

House of the Guild of Girdlers rebuilt in 1697. There is an emblem on the second floor. Restored in 1921.

## THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

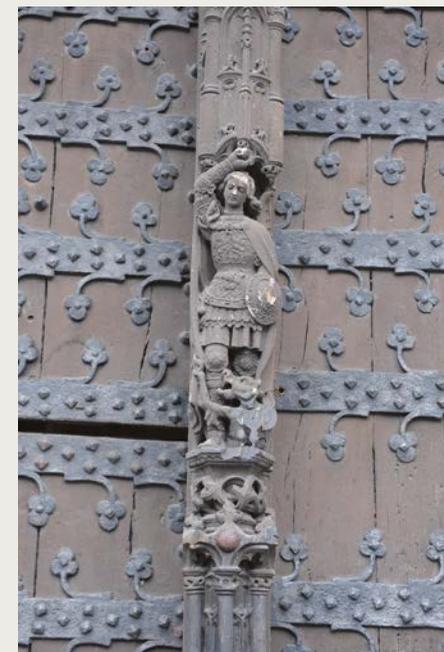
In order to comply with the prescriptions of the 2011 "World Heritage Guidelines", the City of Brussels took the initiative to establish a management plan for the area, in collaboration with the Heritage Department of the Brussels-Capital Region.

Detailed knowledge of the site made creation of this document possible. Urban studies of the surrounding neighbourhood, which encompasses 25 urban blocks covering an area of 156,800 m<sup>2</sup>, have been carried out alongside historical and architectural surveys and inventories.

Bringing together all of the actions and projects currently in progress has facilitated structuring the management plan around strategic objectives defined in cooperation with the different municipal departments and partners concerned. This management document has enabled an innovative working methodology to be implemented and has put all of the actions and projects developed over the past ten years by the City of Brussels and the Brussels-Capital Region into perspective.

The management plan\* fulfils the need to develop a programme of measures which guarantee the proper preservation of the site and ensure its development. The plan is reassessed every six years.

\*The document can be consulted on the City of Brussels website:  
<https://www.brussels.be/unesco-world-heritage>



HHUCB

Saint Michael on the portal of the Town Hall (© HHUCB)



Unesco zone (© Brussels Urbis)

## KEY DATES

**1301:** the City acquires the *De Meerte* house situated on the site of the clock tower of the future town hall to house the municipality's offices.

**Around 1353:** start of construction of a large covered cloth market behind the future town hall.

**1401-1402:** start of construction of the left section of the town hall.

**1441:** the City expropriates the properties on the eastern side of Grand Place, between Rue de Le Colline/Den Heuvel and Rue des Chapeliers/Hoedemaekerstraat, and builds six identical houses.

**1444:** the young Count of Charolais, future Charles the Bold, lays the first stone of the right building of the town hall.

**1449:** start of construction of the upper section of the town hall's tower by architect Jean Van Ruysbroeck.

**1455:** the spire of the town hall's tower is crowned by the statue of Saint Michael created by Martin Van Rode.

**1515-1536:** construction of Maison du Roi/Broodhuys under the supervision of architects Antoine Keldermans, Louis Van Bodeghem and Henri Van Pede.

**1644:** façades of *La Brouette / Den Cruywagen*, and *Le Sac / Den Sack*, rebuilt with stone.

**1690:** façade of *La Louve / De Wolvin* rebuilt with stone after destruction of the building by a fire.

**1695:** bombardment of Brussels by the French army of Louis XIV led by Marshal de Villeroi. The bombardment destroys the interiors of the town hall and *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys*, the covered cloth market behind the town hall and almost all the houses on Grand Place.

**1696-1710:** full or partial reconstruction of all the houses on Grand Place.

**1697:** the City Magistrate publishes an ordinance imposing a right of approval on the reconstruction of the façades of the houses on Grand Place.

**1706-1717:** construction behind the town hall of a building, occupied by the States of Brabant, under the supervision of architect Corneille Van Nerven. The new inner courtyard is decorated with two fountains symbolising the Meuse and Scheldt rivers.

**Late 18th century:** the French sans-culottes (revolutionaries) destroy the statues on the façades of various guild houses and ransack the guilds' meeting rooms.

**1840-1860:** complete restoration of the town hall's tower under the supervision of architect Tilman-François Suys.

**1853:** demolition of *L'Étoile / De Sterre* house to widen Rue de l'Étoile (now Rue C. Buls).

**1860-1903:** complete restoration of the façades and renovation of the interior of the town hall under the supervision of City architect Pierre-Victor Jamaer.

**1875-1895:** demolition and complete reconstruction of *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* by architect Pierre-Victor Jamaer.

**1879-1923:** gradual restoration of the façades of all the houses on Grand Place.

**1883:** under the impetus of Mayor Charles Buls, the City devises an easement agreement with the owners that protects the façades of Grand Place and subsidises their maintenance.

**1897:** reconstruction of the *L'Étoile / De Sterre* house, replacing the ground floor with an colonnade.

**1898-1902:** creation of the monument to Charles Buls and the 't Serclaes monument installed under the arcades of the *L'Étoile / De Sterre*.

**1900-1902:** complete reconstruction of *Le Roi d'Espagne / Den Coninck van Spaignien* based on the 18th century drawings.

**05/03/1936:** town hall and *Maison du Roi / Broodhuys* are listed.

**1960:** creation of the *Ilot Sacré*, quarter around Grand Place, where the City requires all structures to be built in styles from the 17th-18th centuries.

**19/04/1977:** listing of façades of the houses on Grand Place.

**1987-1997 en 1997-1998:** restoration of the spire of the tower followed by the cladding and sculptures on the façades of the town hall under the supervision of City architect Francis Dardenne.

**1998:** UNESCO includes the buildings of Grand Place on the World Heritage List.

**2003-2016:** systematic restoration of the façades of the houses on Grand Place.

**2012:** creation of a management plan for the buffer zone around Grand Place in accordance with UNESCO requirements.

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# Collection Brussels, City of Art and History

The collection *Brussels, City of Art and History* was created to showcase the numerous heritage gems found in Brussels. History, anecdotes, unpublished literature, old illustrations, as well as town planning, architectural and artistic considerations: all these facets will arouse the curiosity of readers and walkers alike.

Generally acclaimed as one of the most beautiful squares in the world, the Grand Place in Brussels is unique due to the nature and quality of its architecture, the authenticity of which has been successfully preserved over time despite the vagaries of history. Since 1998, the Grand Place and its immediate surroundings have been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, thereby benefiting from heritage protection making it possible to safeguard their integrity.

To mark these 20 years of global recognition, the Brussels-Capital Region, together with the City of Brussels, has decided to republish one of the earliest numbers of this collection devoted to this architectural jewel. This new edition is in colour and takes into account recent discoveries resulting from the restoration campaigns carried out in recent years.

Discover the exceptional story of this unique square, the pride of Belgium's capital!

Rudi Vervoort,  
Minister-President  
of the Brussels-Capital Region,  
responsible for Monuments and Sites



**BRUSSELS URBANISM AND HERITAGE**  
BRUSSELS REGIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE

